

## **Written Testimony Supporting Proposed House Bill 7285, An Act Concerning Complaints That Allege Misconduct By Law Enforcement Agency Personnel**

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Jonathan R. Bloom. I am a resident of Wethersfield, Connecticut – the oldest town in the state despite what you may hear elsewhere! I wish to testify today in support of House Bill 7285, replacing Section 7-294bb of the general statutes regarding the acceptance and disposition of a complaint by a member of the general public relating to alleged misconduct by law enforcement personnel.

While I am proud to say that I can number law enforcement officers among my extended family, I also have friends who have been the victims of police misconduct and have had difficulty getting their complaints addressed and resolved. Such difficulties only degrade the critical relationship between the police and the communities they serve. It is imperative that the statutes be changed to remove barriers to the filing, investigation, resolution and reporting of citizen complaints where such barriers exist. This is a state-wide issue to me personally because I frequently travel to high schools around the state to photograph sporting events.

House Bill 7285 is a step toward addressing that problem, but I feel it is insufficient as it stands. Police departments have had years to comply with the statutory requirement to put policies into place and make the forms needed to file complaints available to the public, yet according to a 2017 study by the ACLU of Connecticut, a large percentage of departments are not in full compliance with the law. Clearly, improving how citizen complaints are handled requires not only better procedures but also some degree of coercion to get all of the police departments in the state to comply.

In addition, while it is important to ensure that the filing of a complaint is accessible to the public, it is equally important that persons filing complaints be able to track the processing of the filed complaint and that the numbers and dispositions of filed complaints be openly reported to the public. Action on these matters is needed now rather than some time in 2018.

For those reasons, I request that HB 7285 be amended to:

- 1) provide for a standardized complaint form, to be used by all departments, that is consistent with the best practices for such forms, including provision for anonymous complaints;
- 2) require that departments track complaints in a manner accessible by the complainant and to report the numbers and dispositions of complaints to the public; and
- 3) institute penalties such as the withholding of state-provided funds to departments that do not comply with the statutes.

My belief is that these changes will serve not only the public but the departments themselves. In the fullness of time, even reluctant departments may find that the improvement to their relations with their communities is well worth the effort of providing transparency in the intake, processing, and reporting of complaints.

With that in mind, I urge the members of the committee to amend and support HB 7285.

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